



**Easter Seals Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain, Inc.**

**Regional Service Center**

4400 Central Avenue

Great Falls, MT 59405

SENATE FINANCE & CLAIMS

Exhibit No. 14

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Date 3-3-09

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Bill No. \_\_\_\_\_

March 3, 2009

Senator Keith Bales, Chairman  
Senate Finance & Claims Committee  
Montana State Senate  
P.O. Box 200500  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Sen. Bales:

As this committee considers proposals to positively impact our economy and jobs through the recently passed federal stimulus package (or ARRA), our company also appreciates the opportunity to offer suggestions. Let me begin by noting that Easter Seals-Goodwill is the 7th largest employer in Cascade County and one of the top 100 employers in Montana. Realizing these are one-time only dollars, here are some options for use of the Economic Stimulus Package on behalf of the people we serve.

1) In the area of Job Training and Employment, we currently conduct training programs to help individuals increase their "soft skills" to help them find and maintain employment. With the economic downturn these services could be utilized by many newly unemployed as well. With additional dollars we could expand our services to more people that have not previously been funded by either Medicaid or Vocational Rehabilitation. This would include Veterans, people recently out of prison, seniors that need to return to the job market, and welfare recipients. In our Community Re-entry Programs we have seen recidivism go from an average of 66% to 15% by giving people the needed skills and resources to succeed on the outside.

2) The influx of additional dollars to fund therapy services to children diagnosed with Autism would increase our ability to provide critically needed relationship-based early intervention and occupational and sensory integration therapy. If provided with this type of therapy at very early age children can often lead "normal" lives. We have already seen profound changes in children receiving these services. They learn to communicate and form more typical relationships with their families and teachers and even develop friendships with other children. It's these communication and relationship building skills that we can help them learn between 14 months and 6 years of age that will help them better succeed both in school and later in life. This intervention greatly increases their opportunity to become active contributing members of their families and communities.

The Harvard School of Public Health reported that without early childhood intervention, it can cost \$3.2 million to care for one person with autism over a lifetime. In Easter Seals/Autism Society of America's recent Living with Autism national study some key findings included: 76% of children over 16 with autism have never looked for a job compared to 23% of typical teenagers; 79% of children with autism are likely to still be living in the family home beyond age 18 compared to 32% of typically developing children; and only 14% of parents of children with autism believe their child will be capable of making his or her own life decisions compared to 65% of parents with typical children

3) We are ready to build a combined facility in the Great Falls area. We currently serve over 9,000 people in Montana and Great Falls is our Corporate Headquarters for our 4-state region. Again, I want to underscore that in Great Falls we are the 7th largest employer with over 250 employees. Our main service center is very old and no longer meets the needs of our participants or our staff and our other 5 leased sites are spread throughout the community making it more difficult to provide a continuum of complimentary services for each service participant. These one-time Economic Stimulus dollars could be utilized to help build this much needed facility combining all services to one location, enhancing the impact of our services and allowing us to serve and employ more people in the community.

Also, one time dollars could be use to offset lease payments which in turn in would free up dollars for us to provide additional needed services.

If the committee needs additional details on any of these options, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Michelle Belknap

President/CEO  
Easter Seals-Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain